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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

September 27, 2013

Dr. Kathryn Sullivan Acting Administrator National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration 1401 Constitution Avenue, NW, Room 5128 Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Sullivan:

As you are aware, the proliferation of lionfish (Pterois volitans/miles) in the Gulf of Mexico has accelerated since their presence was first confirmed in December 2009. I am writing to encourage the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to raise public awareness of the adverse impacts of lionfish on economically important species in the Gulf. Promoting the harvest of these invasive species may help alleviate some of the burden on the native reef fish caused by the lionfish's aggressive consumption of native fish populations.

According to NOAA, an unrestrained lionfish population may have negative consequences for commercially valuable species including grouper, snapper, and some crustaceans.<sup>2</sup> The listed marine life make up a distinct portion of the lionfish's diet and are vitally important to the Gulf region's economic sustainability, having contributed over \$516 million commercially to the Gulf region in 2012.<sup>3</sup>

It is imperative that we protect the Gulf reef ecosystems from the devastation this invasive species may cause. Scientists believe the explosion in lionfish populations in the Atlantic ranks among the worst marine invasions in history. Considerable effort to raise public awareness should be made to defend the Gulf before the lionfish establish themselves at levels similar to those on the Atlantic Coast. An important option to consider to control burgeoning populations is promoting the harvest of lionfish, particularly to the more than four million recreational anglers who fish the Gulf region each year.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> NAS – Nonindigenous Aquatic Species, Pterois volitans/miles (Lionfish), http://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/factsheet.aspx?speciesid=963

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Invasive lionfish threaten native fish and the environment in U.S. Atlantic coastal waters, http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/lionfish.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Invasive Lionfish Diet Could Impact Native Coral Reef Fishes, http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/news/weeklynews/dec09/lionfishdiet.html; NOAA Office of Science and Technology, Annual Commercial Landing Statistics http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/commercial-fisheries/commercial-landings/annual-landings/index

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Christie Wilcox, The Worst Marine Invasion Ever, July 1, 2013 http://www.slate.com/articles/health\_and\_science/science/2013/07/lionfish\_invasion\_the\_invasive\_fish\_are\_eating\_so\_many\_native\_species\_that.single.html

Given the devastation lionfish have caused in the Atlantic, I request that you respond to the following questions regarding action in the Gulf of Mexico:

- 1. Please provide a comprehensive list of the scientific research NOAA has available regarding lionfish populations and impacts in the Gulf.
- 2. What is NOAA doing to raise public awareness about the dangers of the establishment and growth of lionfish populations in the Gulf?
- 3. Are there plans in place or plans being developed to stop the invasive lionfish to help protect other commercially valuable species of the Gulf?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important issue. Please contact Rebecca Louviere on my staff at the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public works at (202) 224-6176 if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

David Vitter

Ranking Member

Environment and Public Works